

State of Rhode Island
OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE



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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Written Testimony in support of House Bill 6112, Article 4 Section 6 Resolution (DCYF Child Welfare Information System Replacement)

April 8, 2021


Thank you, Chairman Abney and members of the Finance Committee, for the opportunity to provide this letter of support of House Bill 6112 which requests funding for an updated child welfare information system.

My name is Jennifer Griffith and I am the Child Advocate for the State of Rhode Island. I am the Director of the agency which serves as the oversight to the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). As part of our role as the oversight agency, we monitor the case of each child and young adult open to the Department to protect their legal rights and to promote policies and practices which ensure that youth are safe, and that their physical, mental, medical, educational, emotional, and behavioral health needs are met. The statute provides that we can : initiate litigation on a federal or state level on behalf of children in state care, as well as intervene in any pending cases before the Family Court; review all facilities used by the Department to ensure compliance with their contracts; conduct independent investigations into any matter involving a child or young adult open to the Department, some of which are investigations ordered by the Family Court; review inquiries received by the OCA which can result in providing basic information, an independent investigation, authoring of a report or legal intervention; serve as Guardian ad Litem to youth who are open to DCYF under a voluntary placement agreement; serve as the administrator for the Victim Compensation Program for children under 21; convene public hearings, studies and reports to inform on trends, policy change or reforms within the child welfare system; conduct the child fatality or near fatality reviews; and serve as the monitor to the federal Children's Rights lawsuit filed in 2005.

The "RICHIST" system has been used in its current formulation for over twenty years at DCYF. It is outdated, antiquated and will soon become obsolete. It is extremely difficult to navigate and it is not user friendly in the least. Additionally, it is becoming more difficult to secure the technical expertise to address any issues since it is such an archaic system. For example, I use the system daily in my position as the Child Advocate, and I still need to consult with a particular colleague of mine at our office to ensure that I am looking in the correct place for the correct information about any particular case.

Each of the fatality reviews written in the last five years by my office has requested that DCYF get an upgrade of the system. The main reason is this: the less time that an employee has to spend working with outdated technology is more time that they can be spending with a child, a parent or other person to work on their caseload. Also, as DCYF implements new policies and procedures they have great difficulty weaving them into the current system, which also uses up more of their time which could be spent in direct service. Technology has become much more important in recent years, especially with the pandemic. DCYF employees need to have the most accurate and easy technology to do the very difficult jobs they have and I respectfully request that they be given the funding to pursue this practical and crucial upgrade.

Respectfully,


Jennifer Griffith, Esq.
Child Advocate